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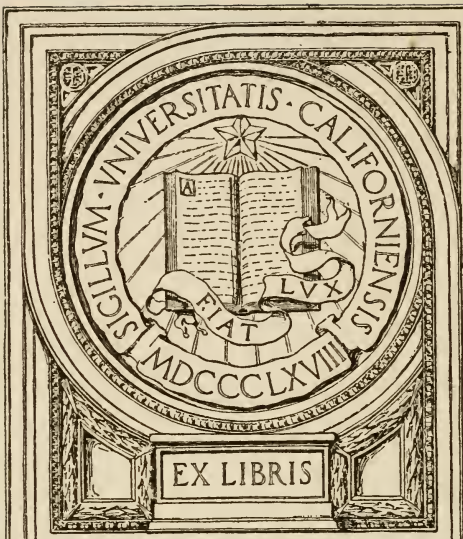
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THE TRAGEDY OF A TROUBADOUR

AN INTERPRETATION OF BROWNING'S SORDELLO

BY

E. H. THOMSON

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS, CORK STREET
M CM XIV

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THE TRAGEDY OF A TROUBADOUR

It is interesting to observe the reading public gradually growing up to an appreciation of certain works which they formerly regarded as beyond their comprehension. The novels of George Meredith is a case in point, and a still more glaring instance is that of Browning's "Sordello." At one time the "select few" read it and understood what they read; being dubbed by the rest, pedantic humbugs; and the epigram concerning the first and last lines being the only two which contained any sense—"and *they* weren't true"—had a vogue like that of any popular song. Now that all these opinions have fallen rather flat, and the British mind is becoming a shade less mechanical, there is a growing interest in criticism of "Sordello," and people are regarding the poem with more or less intelligence.

Of course every critic is wont to read a great part of himself into every transcript of life which may appeal to him, but the fact that different critics with

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differing points of view are able to do so in connexion with one work, proves in itself the greatness of that work, for it mirrors human nature in its ever-varying characteristics.

Students of mediæval prosody claim that "Sordello" is meant to reflect the life and times of the Troubadours. Indeed there is a glowing wealth of detail in the poem to serve as argument for such a theory. An historical man might say that the work on the other hand is a study of the struggle between Guelphs and Ghibellins—a struggle which surged round the particular character of the Troubadour who merely acts as a poetical pivot. The poem is surely all this and a great deal more. Browning himself called it "the progress of a soul," and therefore to examine it in the light of psychology is surely the method which will best embrace every other point of critical view, for "Sordello" is a perfect study of the artistic temperament as embodied in the personality of one man. In the character of this mediæval poet, whom Dante met in his Paradiso, Browning visualises and makes concrete in words all those vague wavering ideas, those dreams of ambition and the practical failures with which the artistic temperament is everlastingly beset; and he draws up a great sweeping survey of a character whose existence had all but dwindled into oblivion until rescued by other

loving labourers in the field of research. But mere "character drawing" is not the only, though it may be the chief, interest in the poem. Browning never confined himself to one point singly in any of his poetic studies. When he makes two people talk to one another he is telling us simultaneously what they are thinking—why they are in such and such a position, what all the circumstances of the case are—and probably draws a comparison between what the world's opinion *is* and what on the other hand it *ought* to be. In the "Ring and the Book," he adopts the easy method of making each "book" represent the point of view of a different person connected with the tragic occurrence ; the matter thereby being made easy of comprehension, we can follow each train of thought quite comfortably. But in shorter works, where Browning has adopted a more *compressed* method, he is obliged to pack much in little, and is open to censure at the hands of impatient and ungrateful readers for being "involved." In "Sordello," which by the general consent of students of Browning is the most "difficult" of all his writings, the style is certainly very complex. Now and again one pauses to ask "What did you say? I couldn't quite catch that. Do you mind repeating it?"

One wonders if one's attention had been wandering for the moment. One goes back for some few lines,

before being able to see and understand: but at the same time, the manœuvre is excusable because he really did not give one enough of a hint as to where he meant to soar—and one had not an athletic enough mind to rise on a sudden without some preparation. Provided there is patience, in returning thus occasionally to disentangle a rather difficult passage, it is possible to derive deep pleasure from this wonderful study of "the progress of a soul."

Nevertheless "Sordello" as a whole does not rank with some of Browning's finest poetry. The first part is immature (in comparison with work written in his best years) both in regard to "presentment of the story" and to the manner in which he clothes his ideas.

It is more than necessarily complex: sometimes it is bewildering, although complexity is of course only an abstract term and sometimes a matter of comparison. To some intellects no doubt even Wordsworth might be complex! To a trained mind "Sordello," for aught I know, might be an affair of simplicity. All depends upon the "unknown quantity" of the brain which is taking it in or failing in the attempt. Moreover if "Sordello" shares the nature of so many works of literary genius and makes a different appeal to every mind (as does Hamlet, for instance), who is to judge of its real quality? One

can only confess one's own impressions, and if others disagree—well—everything can be made a matter for argument.

The style, then, lacks many points in *form*. Browning tries to talk of too many things at once: politics, history, philosophy, romance, classical allusion, all tumbling over one another. Then when a smooth passage of a few lines *does* come, one sees the entanglement which has gone to the making up of it —and then lo! and behold, once more the reader is hurled breathlessly into another entanglement of personality, public interest and private opinion.

After all there is much to be thought of, all at once; but unless one is in good training the literary knots are best untied one at a time: otherwise the strands are apt to become interwoven—and before the knot of Sordello's own character is undone, the Guelphs and Ghibellins embroil us in the struggle. Browning himself wrote (in a preface to his poem, June 1863), that "the historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study." But Browning's backgrounds are always of great importance: some of his very best work lies there: he has always been a past master in the art of "atmosphere" and "setting." And it would seem to

be practically impossible for anyone to understand the poem who had not some preconceived notion of Italian history of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the beginning of the struggle between Guelphs and Ghibellins, the grasping attempts of Germany, and the high notions of papal supremacy entertained by occupiers of St. Peter's Chair.

As to the central figure of the poem—Sordello himself, the personality "compassed murkily about with ravage of six long sad hundred years," Browning employs the strict historical facts of his existence as a basis for the rest of the poetical edifice. Little enough could be found indeed in any records concerning Sordello: he seems to have led a mysterious existence and vanished from off the face of the earth about the middle of the thirteenth century without being much missed. But his name was not destined to die; for Dante made it immortal through the meeting of Virgil and Sordello in the Inferno, and Browning has made it impossible that oblivion should ever reclaim it.

The chief political events of that time are easily summed up. Frederic II. of Germany, who married the daughter of the great crusader John of Brienne, had set out for the Holy Land; but after three days' navigation returned to upset Italy. Honorius III. then occupied the Papal Chair, and excommunicated

the Emperor against whom the second Lombard League had been formed in order to restrain the power of the Germans. But the roots of the difficulty lay further back in history, for Conrad III., founder of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, had also inaugurated the Ghibellin party, with the result that at the time when Browning's poem begins, Ecelin da Romano and Taurello Salinguerra, both representing the Ghibellin cause, were all-powerful in Ferrara. In antagonism to them were Count Richard Boniface and Azzo VII. of Este, both staunch Guelphs : but in consideration of the fact that Ecelin da Romano's first wife had also been of the house of Este, it was deemed politic to marry the daughter of that union to Count Richard—the daughter's name being Cunizza.

Cunizza is also mentioned by Dante in his Inferno and seems to have been a person of complex character ; but Browning calls her " Palma " throughout his poem, and must have had good reason for so doing, for we have it on Mrs. Sutherland Orr's authority (in her famous and invaluable ' Handbook to Browning's Works ') that he had consulted and studied all the chronicles of that period of Italian history which the British Museum supplied.

The first vision of Palma vouchsafed to us in the poem is a short one. We have only time to realise

that Browning had lifted the curtain, as it were, for us to take one hurried glance at a romantic tableau, and then—we are hurtling along once more among descriptions of scenes and events, history, ideas, until he sees fit to land us on to the beginning of the drama, in explanation of the inner meaning of the tableau which has just excited our curiosity and interest.

Sordello is with Palma. Mark the manner in which his passionate devotion is told us—more emphatically indeed than if a trumpet had blared it into our ears. Then, on a sudden, they are disturbed by the quarrel outside in the square, the clanging of the Guelphs and Ghibellins, as they fall to arms.

> "Her wise
> And lulling words are yet above the room,
> Her presence wholly poured upon the gloom
> Down even to her vesture's creeping stir.
> And so reclines he, saturate with her,
> Until an outcry from the square beneath
> Pierces the charm."

But Browning, having whetted our appetite for further news of Sordello and Palma and what they intend to do in the future, breaks off, turns back to explain how it was that Sordello came to be with Palma at all on that evening, and we are transplanted to a castle at Goito "in Mantua terri-

tory " there to be shown what happened thirty years ago. At that time Sordello is " a slender boy in a loose page's dress." He watches " with an earnest smile the noisy flock of thievish birds at work among the yellowing vineyards : " silent, solitary, full of vague thoughts and dreams, perfectly content, asking as yet no questions from life. His dress proclaims him to be in the service of Adelaide, second wife of Ecelin da Romano ; but she leaves him apparently to himself, to dream his time away and feed his mind upon the flowers of his own imagination, and he has no duty save that of making the hours pass pleasantly enough. " Half is slough, half pine-tree forest," with " but one spot reclaimed from the surrounding spoil," that is Goito : " just a castle built amid a few low mountains. Firs and larches hid their main defiles, and rings of vineyard bound the rest." Within the castle itself there are corridors, dusk winding stairs, dim galleries and a maple-panelled room which casts its spell over the mind of the boy Sordello and haunts him through his after years. He spends so much time there that he almost comes to believe that the carvings of the pillars and the panels in that room are instinct with life. At first they oppress him with their severity and silence : then as the courage of his mind increases with his years, he makes use of his imaginative people and turns them into an audience

for the hearing of his ambitions. But as the time crept on, it revealed to Sordello that the carved figures in the maple room could not, after all, be anything to him in the way of human companionship. "Amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone," and was brought to earth by the common-sense side of his mind which showed him the follies of his imagination; nevertheless he follows in the path of all who have the sensitive aesthetic temperament, and these revelations of common sense are quite useless in deterring him from paths of imagination. There is no fool so complete as the artistic fool, and the extent of his folly often is that he is aware of it and does not repine or repent. He will commit the same folly cheerfully over and over again, fully aware that he is being a fool, and is bound in the natural course of events to "get the worst of it" and suffer for his folly. And yet he would not hold himself back, even if he could.

So, when there is love in a sensitive soul, that love continues to be poured out probably on the unworthy, even if it only meets with misunderstanding and disappointment. It has perhaps vested the beloved object with all the beauty of its own store and has blinded itself with its own intensity. Perhaps the sensitive soul is fully conscious too, all the time, of the blindness and knows that the awakening must

come some day. No matter. It is at least true to itself—and never falters. Sordello learned early the secret of his own soul, and was content to weave dreams in spite of the certainty of the awakening later on. After all, the dreams are the reality: the awakening is only the pain through which the greater loneliness of spirit is purchased. From this consciousness of one corner of his mind, Sordello proceeds to the realisation of another factor in the artistic temperament, viz., the wish to be as great as his thought. "Could one but possess, oneself, some special office!" he cries to himself; and with a great heaving of his soul, he shakes off the dream and "now dared to stand alone," and think coolly.

But this flash in his mind is not only the outcome of imagination or ambition. It proceeds from his natural inheritance—explained by the solving of the mystery of his birth which the poet does not yet reveal to the reader. However, for the better understanding of the piece, let it be given here :—

At the time of Sordello's birth, the Guelph and Ghibellin factions had just begun to come to blows in Vicenza after their quarrel had been simmering for many a long day. Ecelin II. being ordered by his enemy to quit the town and being powerless to refuse, at any rate made up his mind to let his presence be felt ere he shook Vicenza's dust from off

his feet. In short, he set fire to a group of houses, and the conflagration spread across the town. There was utter confusion and much massacre of innocent persons—but in Browning's poem all the interest during that terrible day is centred upon two women, Adelaide wife of Ecelin II., who escapes with her infant son, and Retrude, wife of Salinguerra, a soldier. They both owe their safety to Elcorte, an archer who is killed directly, but who makes it possible for them to flee together to the Castle at Goito, where Retrude dies immediately on giving birth to a son.

Since when, Adelaide, caring for her protégé and naming him Sordello, disguises the fact that he is Salinguerra's son, and instead tells the world that he is Elcorte's—that out of gratitude to the father's memory she makes the son her page, hoping in her own heart that thereby he will never have the opportunity of being a rival to her own son (who eventually succeeds his father as Ecelin III.).

So Sordello has military blood in his veins, and sometimes in his dreams he would entertain visions of himself as being as great a man as Frederic the Emperor, "One shape whose potency no creature should escape." But then his mind changes once again, and he becomes softer in heart and more like his real self, while Browning unravels the intricacies of the poet's mind and asks to what purpose is a full

explanation when he only wants to tell us that Sordello had discovered Apollo.

It is indeed a moment full of meaning and of the prophecy of greater things to come, for Sordello had come into his real heritage at last—not the empty honours of a worldly place secured by his forbears, but the full and glowing promise of his own inherited characteristics of temperament. He feels poetic : he is overwhelmed with the desire to express himself—to give vent to all the beauty in his soul—and to be able to make his words worthy of all the thought which lies behind them. His heart is full of song and beauty and love and thanksgiving. He has discovered not only the nature of Apollo to be within himself, but he has found his Daphne, too.

> "So, conspicuous in his world
> Of dreams sat Palma. How the tresses curled
> Into a sumptuous swell of gold and wound
> About her like a glory ! Even the ground
> Was bright as with spilt sunbeams ! . . ."

The law of dreams, however, seems to be as inexorable as the law of reality, and the experience of many artistic temperaments is the same all the world over. Often the very intensity of the dream makes it come so marvellously true that we ask ourselves, "is the reality the outcome of the dream ; or was the dream only the shadow of the oncoming reality ?"

The intensity of the artistic temperament has been known to be so compelling at times, that a man has almost feared to frame his wishes lest they should be granted too quickly and prove to be bad for him after all! For your creature of intensity is perhaps superstitious—certainly hypersensitive, and curiously wrought with paganism and true religion both. Sordello had dreamed for a long while of Palma ; and the desire for an object upon whom he could lavish great love had grown up in his heart side by side with the knowledge that he himself was destined to blossom out into some character which should eventually leave its mark upon the world.

That commonest form of so-called "delusion" in the artistic mind is probably a true instinct after all, for if the world be only a chapter in the history of the making and perfecting of our characters, who knows but that in the next sphere of action the artistic temperaments may after all be permitted to put all their vague yearnings into beautifully expressed forms? Sordello dreamed and yearned: but until he discovered Apollo, his life was but half lived and he was floating in the air. And thus it is with all persons of intensity. They have to find their magnetic pole before their soul's compasses be regulated aright.

Sordello had premonition of Palma. He traversed

the marshes round Goito, feeling certain that he would see her. Time passed heavily : he was growing older : but he still sought her, knowing that dreams always come true if only we have faith enough—and patience : and as he tramped one day, he came to Mantua and found "under the walls—a crowd indeed, real men and women, gay and loud round a pavilion. How he stood ! . . ." with two overwhelming thoughts surging around his brain ; one, the outcome of that terribly real self-consciousness of the intense personality—the ever-wonderfully *humble conceit* of the big soul which feels almost more than it can bear—and which makes its owner believe that its proper sphere is one of magnitude, beauty and importance. In spite of his having been so much misunderstood, unsuccessful, lonely, a mere inactive John o' dreams, perhaps this great gathering would prove to be an occasion on which his true worth and ability should be discovered and recognised ! That was one thought. The other which possessed him was that as his ears caught the sound of "Palma," he wanted to die. Who has not known the mingled torture and rapture of ecstatic moments when one might have been capable of any heroism and then stolen aside quietly to die ? As Sordello reached that pavilion in Mantua and found Palma really there—all his dreams came true. The supreme moment had come. This earthly

life was all too small for his soul; he needed only to look upon her, to express his love triumphantly and then die. But life is not as easy as that. We are always called upon to reappear and face the consequences, feeling small to ourselves and looking small to others. The pavilion had been erected apparently for the purpose of holding a Tournament of Song, but Browning only gives us Sordello's impression of the whole scene. We think his thoughts and see from his standpoint only. The instincts of true love are seldom at fault. Sordello knew that in the nature of things he himself ought to be by Palma's side, but common sense is forced to admit the impossibility of the perfect romance; moreover he recollects that she is betrothed to Count Richard Boniface: and so, his thoughts suddenly turn from the loving strain to a bitterness that ejaculates the probability of her partner being "the very Boniface" himself. Then back Sordello falls under the influence of his prophetic dreams and his lover's instinct. Not Boniface after all but the Troubadour Eglamor, for whose lyrical powers Sordello seems to have entertained a great contempt. He felt an overwhelming temptation to surpass that minstrel, showing the world—and Palma—how splendidly the soul's yearnings can be expressed when the inspirations of Love and of Apollo guide the minstrelsy. "Sordello's

brain swam." All the heroic deeds of the past, all the beauty, all the honour and glory vibrated through his heart; so that as Eglamor finished, he took up the lay, using the same theme but filling up the gaps which the other had left in the song—filling them with light, beauty and poetic fervour, so that as he ceased, there was a general consternation ensuing among his hearers. But once the great deed had as it were allowed itself to be wrought, Sordello lost his divine touch and almost in a state of unconsciousness received the gift from Palma's hand of her own scarf which she had unbound from her neck: and then the whole scene was shut from his sense.

The next thing he remembered was, that he had come home to Goito and that everyone told him that Eglamor had died of grief and shame, that Palma had chosen in his stead Sordello—himself—to be her minstrel in the future; and so he began to think: for "hitherto he had perceived" only:—began to trace over and over again the course and details of that marvellous day. But his thoughts did not end there. They drove him to consider and reconsider his origin, his own personal history (the truth of it had not really reached him yet), and as the past was reviewed so was the future foreshadowed. The triumph of to-day had somehow broken the magic of his dream and given him the best of realities in its stead. As a

result of his being proclaimed "his lady's minstrel" he felt himself to be "Monarch of the world." Hitherto he had been a slave to suppressed longings and could not "assume the mastery which such dreams allot," until such a time as a magical equipment of strength, grace and wisdom should deck him too. Even though he could feel that superiority over others which a hypersensitiveness is apt to impose, he could never in reality take up a superior position because he could give no *worldly* proof of his fitness. To those who have never entered what Pater terms "the Kingdom of Sentiment" it is impossible to explain this difficult point: but all intense persons of the artistic temperament know it well. They feel and know infinitely more than they can ever utter, ever justify or ever explain reasonably. Nevertheless they are not unreasonable enough to ask the world to accept their dreams as realities. Indeed, part of that curious inexplicable suffering endured by the intense people, is the knowledge that they must wait to see their higher claims recognised until they can justify them by some lower show of material merit. And their belief in themselves gives them patience; they know instinctively that all must come right in the end and that every dream shall come true.

For a long time Sordello had been waiting; and now the great material triumph had come, which

should prove to the world that his great expanse of soul was a wondrous thing in very truth. In a moment he had been *raised to his proper sphere.*

The arrogance of intellect has thus suddenly taken possession of Sordello in place of that humility which is surely always one of the virtues of inherent greatness. He is supported too easily at first on the foundations of his own powers and does not realise that unless Heaven wills otherwise, human power of any kind is only of a transitory nature. Then Browning writes of him in a strain that reminds one of Paracelsus. Sordello fondly imagines that he can conceive all human life, seeing from afar off—from his lofty and exclusive position—the bliss of the world, be it great or small, without "tasting any," foregoing all actual experience as being quite unnecessary. He thinks in common with many modern persons of the intense temperament, that the "faculty" for experience is often nearer to the truth than the actual experience of reality which befalls persons incapable of culling any effect, feeling or knowledge, from the experience itself. "Mere consciousness" he believes to be sufficient; and "Song, not deeds, was chosen" as the means whereby in the future Sordello should express himself, his superiority, his genius, and the reflections from the minds and lives of others which shall link him to them in sympathetic

unity. Belief in himself and in his own power so carried him away that he actually thought that "the world's commencement" was merely the background for the song.

Love and success had turned his head undoubtedly; and when, a second time, he came to Mantua to sing in Troubadour fashion to the crowd, was praised, petted, flattered, he gradually goes a step further in his assurance of himself. Feeling that he can so well give men glimpses of themselves in his songs, he thinks that he could present a more complete picture if he were to make the effort. In his imagination he could hear his audience crying for something bigger, wider, more universal in its appeal. Sordello, believing in the unlimited extent of his powers, listens to the voice of imagination and makes the effort. He reconstructs the very language in which his beautiful thoughts are to be conveyed to vulgar ears. He purifies the Mantuan dialect: he sings (as Dante sang) in the vernacular. No poet had ever done the like before. He "slowly re-wrought that language—welding words into the crude mass from the crude speech around him, till a rude armour was hammered out," and having selected his actors and their actions, "he proceeded leisurely to equip" them in the "harness of his workmanship." But failure was the result.

It is clear that the work of the grammarian is not that of the pictorial artist, nor does the work of the road-mender resemble that of the traveller. One stands in close relation to the other: one is necessary to the other: but they are works which differ in their aims and in their origins. Sordello was beginning to lose the spirit of humility and reverent awe which is essential to all greatness; instead of it he began to acquire too confident a spirit within himself—which urged him to overlook his own limitations and imagine that by his will he could accomplish any poetical task however stupendous. He had conquered the problem of language: he had shown the ignorant Mantuans that Eglamor's old-fashioned ditties were entirely out of date, and that instead they should be given some greater form of Song more worthy of their applause. But in this idea, all right in itself, Sordello was reckoning without the powers of inspiration within himself and the mutability of popular opinion. When he first sang to them, the Mantuans received him with delight chiefly, probably, on account of the novelty of the affair. They may have been fond of Eglamor who always sang in the same charming, pleasant old grooves: they certainly always knew what tune he would be likely to sing next: but when the newcomer arrived, he brought fresh excitement with him. His song, moreover, was full of a young

man's passion, and he consequently made a direct appeal to all the hearts which were beating near to him. Enthusiasm, as was most justly due, reached a very high pitch. Sordello had scored a most flattering popular success—which, coupled with the flattery of love too, had completely turned his head. Nevertheless, after indulging in thoughts concerning unlimited triumphs, and after laboriously introducing the vernacular as an instrument of refined language, he finds that the Mantuans no longer care for his lofty strains, and that if he would remain "popular" he must not take his audience along too quickly.

He had begun to lose sight of the fact that when he sang naturally from his heart, the message was inspired and could therefore reach their hearts—humble indeed, but none the less warm for all that; whereas when he sang from his head and stood upon a firm foundation of the most exact intellectualism, his hearers found him dull and without a message. Whenever they did applaud him he was disgusted and disappointed because they had misunderstood his aim and misinterpreted his real meaning. By this, Sordello is proved to be not quite a person of genius. That he has a touch of the magical attribute is the full meaning of Browning's elaborate study of the progress of this soul; but his hero was not the

poet in perfection, but merely the intense person with the artistic temperament.

Had he been otherwise Sordello would never have suffered the pangs of being "sundered in twain," allowing himself to be a poet "thwarting hopelessly the man," never feeling quite certain whether he wished to preserve his life of dreams and ideals or whether he wished to live the full life of an ordinary man and take less thought. Art was developing his soul very much at the expense of his body. Should he allow it to take its course? For a time apparently he did so. Apollo "had thrown quiver and bow away, and the lyre alone sufficed." If Sordello had been constituted of pure genius there could have been no such acute division between the man and the poet. The poet would have incorporated the man in his being; he would have lived and loved and suffered and thought; and as he experienced the practical side of life, his work would have borne the refined impress of personal contact, of truth, of reality; it would have had the clean smell of earth about it; the strength that comes through weakness; the joy that is born of tears. Instead, the half-genius is not great enough to believe in its own inevitability. It begins to soar on artificial wings; it thinks that to rise above the common things of life, it must first forsake them. At first all goes well; then its air becomes

too rarefied for human breathing ; its wings refuse to carry the Muse ; it fails ignominiously because there are no human hearts to bear it up and keep it aloft with the fanning of their beats. Sordello had lost sight of the fact that if you "would have your songs endure" you must "build on the human heart!" And furthermore :—

> "The knowledge that you are a bard
> Must constitute your prime, nay, sole, reward!"

He must perforce be content in the knowledge too, that his powers of expression are restricted. And what artist, be he painter or poet, does not know the pain which the acceptance of that knowledge brings to the eager mind? We all know and hope and aim at bigger things than we can ever accomplish ; performance is always so hopelessly inadequate when compared to the thought behind it ; and therein lies the secret of that humility which every great artist must necessarily feel if he would be true to himself and true to his inspiration.

PART II.

BEFORE the end of the First Book is reached, Browning begins a new chapter in Sordello's history without giving his reader very much warning. The news is hurled forward unexpectedly that a sudden sickness has set the world free of Adelaide; she has died at Goito, and her restraining influence being removed, forthwith many political and military plans are prepared for immediate projection. The Guelphs and Ghibellins begin their fray once more. Romano's troops swarm like a hive of bees in the valley; and everybody who knows the state of affairs expects to hear and hear again the clash of arms and witness the merciless behaviour of the opponents towards one another. But no faction can take part in strife with any hope of success unless the leader be whole-hearted—and in the Ghibellin camp there seemed to be some question concerning their chief. Ecelin da Romano had ever fought with Taurello Salinguerra as his right-hand man. Indeed, the latter had sacrificed all private considerations, and lived only

for the service of this militant commander during many long years. And now, at this very moment, Taurello was absent with Frederic the Emperor expecting to sail next month for Syria. (But we have seen how that expedition was never achieved, the Emperor preferring excommunication to the undertaking of a crusade); and, as they wait, Taurello receives a message from Ecelin da Romano which decides him to return at once to Northern Italy.

Browning gives but a few lines of the letter, but the words are strong, determined and characteristic. As a matter of fact, Ecelin has grown tired of the fighting. He is getting old, and his past misdeeds weigh heavily upon him. What use is the Kaiser's gold to such an one? He notices his children's eyes watching him daily to see whether his power of carrying that double breastplate is in any way diminishing. He is beginning to experience the pathos of wisdom and of old age. Moreover, Hilary the Monk has been speaking words of peace to him of late, warning him that he will pray upon his knees continually until such time as God shall exact punishment for the misdeeds of the past. The cruel trick which Ecelin had played upon Taurello Salinguerra in disguising the fact that the latter's son lived in the person of Sordello is one of the many sins which need atonement; and besides other serious and heavy considerations, there is the

momentous question of a possible peace between Guelphs and Ghibellins such as he had never dreamed of in his more passionate youth. If Count Richard Boniface is to wed Palma, he soliloquises, the two factions might eventually embrace one another—and he himself, Ecelin da Romano, might for ever forsake the world and seek forgiveness in the cloister.

But such a message as this, sent to a man of iron like Taurello, more than rouses him ; Taurello puzzled, impatient, nevertheless deems it best to make no show of wrath at present, so he merely shrugs his shoulders and bides his time. And in the interim his old friends in Mantua wish to give him a welcome, so an entertainment is arranged, and Sordello chosen as the minstrel on the occasion of such festivity.

Those in authority who made the selection do not understand this difficult temperament — this turbulence in the calm exterior—this pride in defeat, this defeat in victory, which is at once a blessing and a curse upon Sordello. Just in such a manner as lack of recognition for his genius used to embitter him, so now he is half contemptuous of his success. He scorns those who bid him excel his rivals, even as he scorns his rivals themselves.

Nobody seems to understand the yearnings of his

soul save Palma. His song seems to be of no value now that it has ceased to voice either his love or his aspirations. It has grown cheap and vulgar. It is unworthy of him. His pride revolts at being at last a mere "popular society entertainer." For the moment he has lost that blissful knowledge which acquaints all artists with the comfort that if they give of their best, they need ask for nothing higher—and in disgust he "quits Mantua—slow, alone."

What thoughts occupy his mind? Chiefest, that bitter knowledge that "out of that aching brain, a very stone, song must be struck." What has gone wrong with it that it should suddenly have ceased to become natural, transforming itself into a mere hard piece of mechanism? Surrounded by all the worldlings in Mantua, he had been encouraged to lift up his voice; and as the days had dragged along, his inspiration had gradually decreased and subsided, until in this moment of overwhelming disgust he realises that the best part of his muse has been utterly crushed out of his life. Proof of it lies in the other thoughts which occupy him. He looks on at himself as it were and views himself, thinking mean and meagre things; how, for instance, the evening before, when he had been praised for his dignity of mien, he had felt more awkward than was his wont. Then, in a passion of mental irritability,

he tells himself that "Verses may come or keep away!" He tries to shake himself free from the clinging torture of it all and gain rest in forgetfulness.

After a lapse he had arrived at the place where his heart had always found the greater peace: he had come home to Goito, entering upon the second chapter in the history of the progress of a soul: learning the bitterness of experiencing *inward* failure and realising that, although many valuable work-a-day lessons can be learned in the world, there are lessons of still greater value to be learned in the peaceful way of solitude, communing with nature and permitting the soul to govern its own expansion.

In the familiar peace of Goito he was throwing off all the shackles of convention, of suffering, of worldliness. "A dream is o'er, and the suspended life begins anew." Mantua's familiar shapes die, and as he regains his own elementary nature under the influence of solitude he sees the folly of all the complexity which he has believed would bring him to truth and perfection.

Utterly brain-weary he gave up the struggle and in a moment of inspired inward vision saw himself ascending in the spiritual scale, increasing in power too, while he held himself quietly and stilly, breathing in the benefits of heaven. He abjures will and the

means to show will, whether it be great or small, material or spiritual; and resting thus a sweet and solitary year he remains at Goito. His eyes, once upon a time bright with exploring, are now grown dim and satiate with the receiving of inward peace. Instead of the flash of the enthusiast his eyes now show the peaceful expression of the dreamer, and he has recovered from the turmoil of the wrestling match which his soul had formerly fought within itself.

And so, on a declining autumn day—(I am using Browning's own words) when there were few birds flying between him and a grey heaven, when no wind troubled the tacit woods—he sauntered home complacently, feeling that his own mood and nature's were one in happy accord. By this time, every spark of Mantuan life was trodden out, and indeed the embers were so dark that Sordello had quite forgotten how to play the Troubadour, how to make his brain conceive the idea, or his tongue to give expression to it; and in a moment he is at his old trick of looking at himself with his mind's eye, drawing some philosophical conclusion and coupling it with a pessimism that would almost do credit to a twentieth century dramatist.

"Nature has time to amend her errors. She knows that her occasion will recur. How does a mere landslip affect her? Not one whit. She has

magnificent resources. In my case all is different. I must perish once, and in that once, perish utterly . . . Nothing but Love is worth having"; and Sordello tortures and delights himself in thinking over the delicious past which he shared with Palma. It is as though a third person were repeating the story to him, telling him that she still awaits his coming.

"She heard you first woo her through the snow-month, but dared not give you any answer until the coming of April. Linden-flower-time-long her eyes were on the ground: and not until July came did she consent to meet you in the moonlight and whisper (the damp little hand in yours) of love that endures till death."

The memory of it stirs Sordello's soul to its depths; in a wealth of metaphysical argument he weighs all that the world can give in satisfied ambition as against the peace and harmony of being "deposed, immured clandestinely—still petted, still assured that to govern were fatiguing work."

He is slowly but surely developing common sense side by side with his poetic genius.

And as he thinks and argues and philosophises, news reaches him from the outer world concerning this very Palma for whom his heart is overburdened with love.

"The father of our Patroness" (Palma's father Ecelin da Romano) "has played Taurello an astounding trick," runs the rumour. He parts his wealth between his sons Ecelin and Alberic and goes into a convent. "Count Richard of Boniface and Palma plighted troth a week since at Verona; and they doubtless want you, Sordello, to contrive a marriage chant before Richard goes to storm Ferrara."

Sordello only needed to hear this—to hear of the clash of political factions, of his love's danger, perhaps, and he forthwith starts on his journey to be by her side. It seems to be the first really brilliant thing he has ever done. He is off his guard, not thinking of himself or of his perpetual moods or self-development. He is taken out of himself suddenly by the need for action in connexion with some one other than himself, and before a day and a night have passed, he is in Verona, in the palace with Palma.

Suddenly the clash of arms is in their ears. They rise, approach the balcony and gaze upon the tumult down below; but in what measure does the fate of nations affect a lover when he is with his lady after a long and bitter separation? Interruption only adds fuel to the fire. Guelph may kill Ghibellin or Ghibellin may slaughter Guelph: it is immaterial. Sordello is with Palma, and she is telling him the most enchanting confidences, throwing back her curls

and confessing that she has been in as much need of him as he had been of her. They talk lovers' talk straight into each other's heart, recalling the day when first they met, gloating over the sweet memory, and then Palma reveals her mind and her ambitions to Sordello. It is a matter of grave concern to her that her father, Ecelin da Romano, should suddenly have relinquished all his military command, renounced the world, and replaced it by the vows of a monk. Such actions are leaving Taurello Salinguerra "in the lurch"; the faithful servant is without a master: and the opportunity for utilising his valuable assistance is quickly passing. With unerring instinct Palma sums up the whole situation: shows that she is now the sole capable representative of Ecelin da Romano and urges that by noon to-morrow (if she and Sordello make their flight from Verona at once) they may be in Ferrara, reaching that town before the arbitrators can arrive, and by holding an interview with Taurello plan a scheme which shall be worthy of themselves and of the Ghibellin cause. With a woman's unerring instinct of that which is most effective, she sweeps away from Sordello, leaving him to think the matter over, nothing doubting but that she has won him to her cause. Are we not always prejudiced in favour of the enthusiasms of those we love? More especially when they flatter our good sense and take

for granted that we are broad-minded enough to see the importance of the issues at stake.

So, Sordello thinks it over: and while he meditates, Browning performs a few intellectual acrobatics on his own account, and keeps the reader's attention fixed during the performance of a tour-de-force of no less than four hundred and thirty lines, which have nothing whatever to do with the narrative of the progress of this particular soul. However, at the beginning of the Fourth Book, the style runs in a more rational channel. A picture of Ferrara comes first of all: then of a garden inside the city, enclosed by a tall red-brick wall, containing trees, a fountain, statues, terraces, and looking over all, the palace of San Pietro, the house of Taurello Salinguerra, "and here, emerging from the labyrinths below, Sordello paused beside the plinth of the door pillar."

What were his thoughts? and what had been in his mind ever since he left Verona! In brief, he had made one step forward in his soul's progress: he had learned that his former disposing of the active life in favour of the contemplative was worse than *wrong*, in that it was *stupid*. For he had seen the army in Este's camp, the Envoys' march and the Papal Legate's cavalcade. The more he pried into that crowd the more dissatisfied did he grow, not with *them* but with himself. He saw himself as a poor

creature beside them, not because he was in any whit inferior: on the contrary he was still their superior: but he felt a poor creature because he had never used his superiority in any way that could help or upraise their inferiority. It was as though he had neglected his duty: and that is an uncomfortable sensation often experienced by persons of conscience. He began to be ashamed of himself. And were these people the great leaders of whom he used to dream and rave in his solitude up at Goito? Why! how different they were from what his imagination had so often pictured them! To begin with, there were representatives of every type and class from the chiefs themselves, down to the very humblest soldier; and as crowd upon crowd rose before him and his poetical sympathetic mind embraced "every look and tone, the mirth as well as woe," that fixed at once his estimate of the result, their good or bad estate, old memories returned with good effect: Sordello was deeply moved, and in a new body as it were before he could suspect the change in himself, and holding out his hands to his brothers, of a sudden "mankind and he were really fused," at last. He has become a potential philanthropist.

Do we not often see nowadays in the twentieth century that painters, writers, actors, musicians strive for years in their world of art, achieve a great height

and finally forsake all so as to put themselves and their genius at the service of the Suffering Poor? They do not ask themselves whether their efforts are merely the result of another emotional phase in the progress of the soul belonging to an intense temperament, and those whom they benefit ask nothing but a continuance of their good deeds. It is Sordello over again fusing himself with mankind; realising the brotherhood of all humanity. "But"—he thinks:—"nothing much can be done while all these folk are so unequal. What boots it if a few, here and there, can show a mind which it would repay my own to find? If an august few can be discovered, how about the rest grovelling in the dust?" Can it be possible that Sordello is a socialist? He talks to himself of first establishing an equilibrium, procuring "privilege" such as "the few" had formerly possessed, and giving it to all men. But he does not pursue the matter to a practical issue. Does he only count material things as "good?" Surely not, with such a mind and such a temperament. Then if "spiritual" gifts are more good, how can he dream of equality? for do not the spiritual gifts of all men vary in kind and in degree? At any rate, he felt that he had been doing grievous wrong to himself and to mankind. While he had been "occupied with Mantuan chants," he says to himself that he should have been

thinking of men, taking their wants such as he distinguished now on every side, satisfying them, by some means proceeding from the rare qualities of his own soul.

It does not seem to occur to him that the period of the Mantuan chants might be thought of as a time of probation: that without the experience which that time had given him, his ears might now have been deaf to the needs of the rest of mankind. Nevertheless, impulsive as the contemplative man always is in matters of sentiment, he is invariably singularly cautious in the concerns of the active life. Sordello told himself that he must not be rash; and on thinking the matter over he decides with more common sense than modesty that perhaps it were as well not to take the lead and put himself in Ecelin da Romano's place at once but to agree to playing instead, second fiddle to Taurello Salinguerra. Taurello, he reasons, will be best able to tell him how to make these people happy. Happiness! That henceforth shall be his great aim. He has felt the need of it all too sorely himself not to realise the bitterness of the absence of it in the crowds before him. And, as by inspiration, he now sees what he believes to be Palma's meaning. If everybody be not striving for happiness, why else is the fighting taking place, he asks. It is the kind of question a poet or a man bred

in the solitude of Goito *would* ask. The very idea of mixing up happiness and battles shows how utterly foreign was Sordello's nature to the life in which "practical politics," ambitions, love of power, greed for money and possessions, are almost the breath of existence. The fighters do not want happiness: they crave excitement: and presumably they get it. Which party, asks Sordello, will bring men most good: Guelph or Ghibellin? The answer is hard to give. Therefore he will confront Taurello, and ask *him* to form a party, be it Guelph or Ghibellin, be it allied to the cause of Pope or Emperor, be it loyal or traitorous to the League—a party that shall band itself together for the one great purpose of rescuing the people from Unhappiness, and showing them the path to Liberty and Happiness. Of course, Sordello talks to himself in this fashion, common to all unpractical dreaming enthusiasts who forget the very definitions of the words they use together with the all important fact that the People, taken as a whole, have no wish for the kind of Happiness which a person of Sordello's temperament would be likely to offer them. Nevertheless, that is a little lesson which, being of such humble make, always seems to escape the notice of people with vast ideas —and they probably learn it quite at the end of a very long day.

Sordello "confronts Taurello." Browning gives no details of the interview : he only tells us what each man was thinking *before* the interview took place and likewise what each man was thinking after the meeting was over. "Scarce an hour has passed, when forth Sordello came, older by years than at his entry ;" for Taurello had told him something practical concerning warfare which had opened his poor, poetical eyes, and "he staggered off, blind, mute, and deaf," into Ferrara, the town itself, to see its circumstance of desolation for himself, not returning to speak with Salinguerra again until he is joined by Palma.

What a contrast, thinks Browning, between the two men !—"that minstrel's thirty years just spent in doing nought," their most notable event, their coming to Ferrara that day, "who yet was lean, outworn and really old, a stammering man that scarce dared raise his eye before the magisterial gaze" ; and on the other hand, "Salinguerra with his fears and hopes of sixty years, his Emperors and Popes, cares and contrivances, yet, you would say, it was a youth nonchalantly looked away through the embrasure northward" over the trees.

In those sixty years Salinguerra had not fought and travelled to no purpose. He had learned to

speak "the Greek's own language," and "since Arab lore holds the stars' secret" he had taken the trouble to master it; architecture too, found a patron in him when he employed Guido of Bologna to build the Church of St. Francis in Bassano; he could play the angelot and sing pleasant rhymes. Whereas Sordello only cared to know about men as a means whereby he could show himself.

And these two, unbeknown to one another, are father and son.

Browning draws a splendid portrait of the fighting man, who is for the moment divided in his mind as to who should receive the badge sent by the Emperor for the Ghibellin leader. Up to the present, in ordinary circumstances, the honour and leadership would naturally have fallen to Ecelin da Romano, but that is out of the question now that he has become a monk; if Salinguerra so willed, he himself could be made Imperial Prefect and thereby deprive Ecelin's son of the honour. But what would be the use? Empty titles are no comfort to Salinguerra, and he reviews his own career in a soliloquy which is characteristic and noble.

Meanwhile, Sordello and Palma meet by one of the watch-fires of Ferrara at midnight and talk matters

over again. "Tell me," he begs Palma, "as it is your cause, what makes a Ghibellin? There must be some laws at work explaining the mystery of the existence of such a faction. But to my mind all this fighting, this death and carnage seem to me so revolting and yet at the same time I am assured that you and Salinguerra—persons of noble, upright character and the very highest aim—would not go on fighting unless such a course of action were to lead to some good result. Assure me, therefore, that good may lurk under the evil, and I will believe you. This morning as I saw the crowd, I esteemed myself a recreant to my race: but to what purpose to boast my spirit's force, if its object is to be denied? Why did Salinguerra speak to Tito of Trent, the Kaiser s representative, in tones that made me believe he only looked upon the army as a mere tool, and not as a number of men built up of flesh and blood? You both wish the outcome of everything to be the profit of the Ghibellin faction. Nothing is considered as a means whereby to relieve the wretchedness of the individual. Every thought is for "the cause." In the opposite camp, Azzo does likewise. And what means do these Guelphs employ to gain their ends? Are their methods *your* methods? worse or better?"

Alas! Guelphs and Ghibellins are proved alike,

and after a long debate Sordello and Palma come to the conclusion that there is little to choose between the deeds of blaze and blood of one faction and the answering deeds of blaze and blood of the other.

"Both sides do worse than nothing," exclaimed Sordello bitterly, and with his never-to-be-crushed conceit he immediately reads into his circumstances some higher meaning and message which his intense temperament imagines that it is called upon to interpret. What should have brought him here to Ferrara, to move Taurello, he asks himself, if there did not exist some great cause distinct from all these new political issues, which he had been previously ordained to discover? The spirit of inspiration must never be hurried—and indeed cannot be coaxed. Sordello must have known that from his earliest years. He could feel that some message would be sent to him, some divine order which his soul would understand and be able to obey blindly. So he was prepared to wait; and the message came sooner than he expected. Some passer-by spoke of Crescentius Nomentanus, a Roman of centuries past who had "stood erect, and from his brain" tried to introduce a new era of happiness for the People—and almost before the passer-by had finished commenting upon the dead man's character, Sordello has conceived an

idea which transcends all his former notions and fills him with a new excitement. Rome!

"Let Rome advance!
Rome, as she struck Sordello's ignorance—
How could he doubt one moment? Rome's our Cause!
Rome of the Pandects, all the world's new laws—
Of the Capitol, of Castle Angelo; . . .
Let us have Rome again! On me it lights
To build up Rome—on me, the first and last:
For such a future was endured the past!
And thus, in the grey twilight, forth he sprung
To give his thought consistency among
The People. . . ."

PART III.

JUST in the same manner as Sordello had tasted the full experiences of the contemplative life, he was now to suffer all the disappointments of the active. It will be remembered that he had learned to realise the bitterness of the fulfilment of poetic desire in his triumph of minstrelsy; he had wrung truth from his own thoughts; he had drunk the literary cup to the very dregs. But as he would always stand as an incurable dreamer, even now, in considering the appeal of the active life, he was being caught again in the toils of the intense temperament, and perhaps because the active life was not really destined for him by nature he was able to see, quicker than was his wont, the utter futility of his striving and the utter hopelessness of his aims. He had spent a day in examining the squalor of the lives of the inhabitants of Ferrara, with the result that the arches of his dreams had fallen into ruin, for he had seen how unfit the people were as yet to receive the freedom of

that new born city wherewith he would have liked to reward them.

> " He sat upon the terrace, plucked and threw
> The powdery aloe-cusps away, saw shift
> Rome's walls, and drop arch after arch, and drift
> Mist-like afar those pillars of all strife,
> Mounds of majesty. 'Thou archetype,
> Last of all my dreams and loveliest, depart!' "

So he still has enough common sense to see that he cannot verily become a god and order all the workings of this world, however high and mighty his intentions might be—and there follow, in Browning's words, some of the most beautiful lines in all the six books which go to the making up of this history of the progress of a soul.

> " God has conceded two sights to a man,—
> One, of men's whole work, time's completed plan,
> The other, of the minute's work, man's first
> Step to the plan's completeness."

A voice is in Sordello's ear telling him by no means to lose heart. What has been dispersed save the hope of attaining "the supreme step"? May it not be that Sordello was vouchsafed the larger vision, that gift of all intense temperaments—in order that, through experiencing human inability to reach the highest point of imagination, he should be content to fulfil an easier and a lowlier task? He was being gradually led to recognise the unerring law of life

that "he who means to help must still support the load." We cannot see the perfected edifice of our building unless we have toiled painfully at the laying of each brick and set the seal of our energy upon each detail of design. There must be no shirking, no hurrying, no skimping of the work, it must be faithfully and painfully performed. Sordello feels the certainty now, that his vision of a renewed Rome ended abruptly because of the lassitude of his own nature. He knew that in the days of Goito he dreamed half his time away; he lived more in the imaginative than in the practical world; his heart was full of poetry, most of which remained unexpressed. All down the line he had lacked that ability to pull himself together and do some unself-conscious work. The same inability to shake free of himself haunted him now, when face to face with the necessity for taking action. His vision of Rome vanished into space because his conscience told him that if he were to begin brandishing the falchion and lead the people, he would find "the real falchions difficult to poise, and would fling them afar so as to taste once more the cream of joys by wielding the weapons in fancy."

Again he is pursued by the demoniacal thought that he is "half a man and half a poet": he finds it impossible to take a decisive line with any ease such as a practical man like Taurello finds so simple a

thing to do, and he realises that if he would confer benefits upon the people, he must use existing customs and circumstances, and on no account carve out a new and unheard-of policy of his own. This very dislike of using existing institutions is a trait very common to all poetical enthusiasts, and its very wastefulness and extravagance is one proof of its undesirability. Knowing, therefore, that he must make his choice of weapons to his hand wherewith to fight the battle of Happiness for the People, Sordello chooses the cause of the Pope as against that of the Emperor, and suddenly makes up his mind that in spite of all that Palma had said, he must be in future a Guelph. But has he not been given the tongue of a minstrel? Does he not excel in the arts of persuasion? Therefore, shall he not talk to Salinguerra, that most powerful of leaders, and induce him also to see the rights of the case, come over to the Guelph camp? With immense courage Sordello returns to speak with Palma and Salinguerra, anxious to explain every point of his new view and persuade the leader of the rectitude of the course which must now be pursued; but alas! as is the way with persons of the intense temperament, Sordello only made a very feeble show. His argument "dropped flat, through his accustomed fault of breaking yoke, disjointing him who felt, from him

who spoke." He kept glancing first at one and then the other to see what effect he was producing, like a runner in a race who loses his leading place by reason of the bad habit of turning round to see whether he is being gained upon by the competitor following at his heels ; and all to no purpose too, for the winner often wins contrary to expectation, and the reception accorded to Sordello by Taurello was entirely surprising and original. He neither snubbed nor praised the poetic spokesman ; but true to his character he was thinking busily in what way he could make use of this enthusiast, for there is nothing like enthusiasm for being bent in all directions ; warmth is always useful ; it is coldness and indifference which hang about useless in a busy world. And as Taurello thought the matter over, Sordello was saying that fantasies could so break and fritter away youth, that he (Sordello) had begun to lose all earnestness in the disheartening pursuit of ideals, that his power to do good work had gradually been slipping away from him and he was fast losing "the power to even express the need of working!" Earth was becoming as it were a grave to him ; he was being obsessed by the most uncontrollable melancholy ; he saw with horribly clear foresight the years to come as they stretched before him giving him time to dream in—"time to hope and time to despond,

remember and forget, be sad, rejoice," and he knew at last that he had, as it were, outlived his dreams and come to the reality, to the realisation of all their promise and prophecy, and he felt that he must convince Taurello of the necessity for casting in his lot with the Pope.

One deeply interesting consideration is borne upon us at this point in the poem, viz., the consideration that Sordello had received psychic knowledge of the fact that his dreams had come to an end and that he was close to an awakening. So true to life is this picture of Sordello straining every nerve to grasp the reality of things, that it is no surprise to us to find that of course he was on the wrong tack. When the intense temperament experiences such definite knowledge as Sordello had suddenly acquired, it is not safe to assume that the knowledge can be put to immediate use through the medium of material action. Even all the psychological experiences which had befallen Sordello had not cured him of that self-confident belief in his own opinion, and he always overlooked the fact that when once we have listened to any "still small voice" within our heart, it is as well to give it opportunity and permission to speak twice.

Taurello poured such gentle scorn upon Sordello's remarks that the poet was enduring fresh tortures.

Why should "a puny, ailing vassal" think that the world and himself are bound in any special link? What difference would it make to anybody on earth if a poor drudge whose main employment so far had been merely "contemplation" were to imagine that he could "lift the globe" and order the world?

But Taurello's scorn did not stop Sordello's pleading. He pleaded that he knew in his inmost soul what were the needs of the people: that a new Rome must be built: but that in spite of having conceived the inspired notion, he felt himself unable to perform the actions necessary to the fulfilment of the plan. Therefore, he begged Taurello to hear and understand and perform those necessary actions, take upon himself the leadership, proclaim the Guelph cause as being that which is nearest to the satisfaction of the human need of the people, and become the champion of the ideas of emancipation.

And Taurello turns to Palma, saying that all this talk is to no purpose, for the Emperor's badge lies in his hand ready to be conferred upon someone fitted to bear it, that Palma's father being in a monastery, and her brothers being out of the question, Taurello himself wishing for nought but an obscure place in which to finish his days, what more suitable than that Sordello, whom Palma loves, should accept the office under the Ghibellin in trust for the Emperor?

The next moment saw Palma relating the secret of Sordello's infancy told her by dying Adelaide, and Taurello Salinguerra looking upon his son whom he had invested with the badge of the Emperor and the leadership of the Ghibellin cause.

It was a dramatic moment, full of suffering for them all ; Sordello very pale, sitting speechless trying to frame his thoughts, trying to erect some of his castles in the air which had fallen with such a crash, trying to think sanely. Taurello, garrulous from nervousness, speaking rather wildly of Ghibellin victories to come : Palma uneasy on account of the turmoil which she had caused, but tactful and reasonable as usual in an emergency. She leads Taurello downstairs, away from Sordello for a short time, in order to give them both a chance of restoring their mental balance, and they turn into a room beneath that one in which they left the Troubadour.

Of the agony in Sordello's mind it is not fitting to speak here : Browning has dissected every shade of thought and written of it in the sixth book which closes the history of the progress of this soul, showing that the intense temperament asking for "all beauty and all good" often achieves nothing either good or beautiful because it is set in an atmosphere of antipathy. It languishes in the absence of "that power to uplift its own power" and is worn out with the

struggle with itself along the path which leads to light and understanding.

As Taurello Salinguerra and Palma sit together in that lower chamber, a stamp is heard overhead.

Suspecting a calamity they rush upstairs. But it is no calamity which has occurred. The over-burdened heart of the Troubadour has beat its last, the voice of the poet will sing no more: for God in His mercy has released the soul from the chafing fetters of this difficult world, and Sordello is dead.

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